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TITLE: Networking On Harm Reduction In The CEE Region, A Possible Approach To Influence Local Drug Policies

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ISSUE: The Central-Eastern European region and the Newly Independent States have faced with the most recent HIV epidemic among injecting drug users. The use of home made preparations of illicit drugs, such as poppy tee, or kompot was known before the collapse of the former economic and political system. The injection drug use, and use of smuggled drugs appeared after the system changes. Lack of information and financial sources, and punitive drug policies as well, make it difficult to deal with these emerging problems. Besides the abstinence oriented treatment system, Harm Reduction Programs started to work in the mid nineties to prevent HIV epidemic among injecting drug users. Most of such programs were funded by foreign funders. In 1997, these programs founded a network with the support of UNAIDS, The Lindesmith Center, and other international organizations.

SETTING: The Network intends to cover the whole geographical region of the former Eastern Block with information on HIV Prevention methods. Language barrier has been solved by applying bilingual, English-Russian media.

PROJECT: The Network provides printed and electronic media for its member programs through the bilingual Newsletter, the bilingual Web site, regular materials on the listserver. Several international organizations showed interest about the activity of the network, and developed regular contacts, and links on their Web sites, e.g. the European Eunion Phare Program on Demand Reduction, the Lindesmith Center, the International Harm Reduction Association. .

RESULTS: The Harm Reduction programs have got an international publicity through the network activities, and developed influence on the national level policy making. The Network provides an umbrella of the emerging national Harm Reduction Networks in several countries.

LESSONS LEARNED: Networking of Harm Reduction programs provided international and national attention on the activities of member programs. It strengthens its program members, and provides ongoing information flow. The member programs provide training and expertise and participate in the national policy planning. (*Summarize the lessons learned and implications*).

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